

**State HPC Meeting
March 1, 2008
Roadrunner Room, Arizona Game and Fish Department Headquarters
Phoenix, Arizona**

Present:

Craig McMullen, AZ Game & Fish Dept
(AGFD)
Al Eiden, AGFD
Brian Wakeling, AGFD
Tom Mackin, Coconino Sportsmen
Larry Phoenix, AGFD
Ron Thompson, AGFD
Joe Currie, AGFD
Leonard Ordway, AGFD
Bill McLean, AZ Game and Fish
Commission
Wade Zarlingo, AGFD

Ken Clay, AGFD
Benny Aja, Rancher
Richard Youngker, Rancher
Pete Cimellaro, AZ Deer Association
Ron Eichelberger, AZ Elk Society
Steve Clark, AZ Elk Society
David Grandmaison, AGFD
Scott Lerich, National Wild Turkey Federation
Lanie Ozment, AGFD
Ron Pittman, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Julie Pittman, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruth Gregory, AGFD

Roll Call of Local HPC's:

Alpine-Springerville – Ron Eichelberger
Show Low – Wade Zarlingo
Winslow – Ken Clay
Forage Resource Study Group – Larry
Phoenix
Fredonia – none
Williams-Flagstaff – Tom Mackin

Kingman – none
Prescott – Lanie Ozment
Southwest – none
Southeast – Ron Thompson for Safford HPC
Tucson – None
Payson Natural Resources Committee –
Craig McMullen

Conservation groups represented:

AZ Desert Bighorn Sheep Society – Pete
Cimellaro
AZ Deer Association – Pete Cimellaro
AZ Elk Society – Steve Clark

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation – Ron Pittman
AZ Deer Assn, Buckskin – Pete Cimellaro
National Wild Turkey Federation – Scott Lerich

Approval of minutes from meeting of August 25, 2007: A motion was made to approve the minutes as submitted. The motion was seconded and carried.

Overview of Unit 4A Habitat Enhancement Effort: Ken Clay, Unit 4A Wildlife Manager presented. The work was based on the AGFD Region I Habitat Plan, which is GIS based. Ken discussed limiting factors on both habitat and project implementation. Funded water projects since 2000 have resulted in 25 miles of pipeline with 32 drinkers, including 10 additional miles since 1998. The major projects are the High Point Well pipeline project, the Pablos project, and the Durfee Trick Tank rebuild. The landowner involved in High Point Well is Jim Ohaco who

uses his heavy equipment on many of the projects. The Durfee Trick Tank was completely refitted and with its three new 7,000 gallon storage tanks and elk enclosure fence, it is now a maintenance free perennial water source. These projects took place thanks to a variety of partnerships in which cooperators provided funding, labor or administrative work in support of the projects. Partners in this landscape scale endeavor include the HPC program, as well as the Arizona Antelope Foundation, the Arizona Elk Society, AGFD's Heritage IIPAM program, AGFD Special Big Game License Tag program, AGFD's stewardship program, Dutch Joe Ranch, Hopi Three Canyons Ranch, Ohaco Ranch, Natural Resources Conservation Service WHIP and LIP granting programs, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Unit 4A Habitat Enhancement also includes several vegetation projects, mainly to address piñon-juniper encroachment into grasslands. Increasing browse diversity and herbaceous production was the goal, as well as analyzing stem size and soil types to help ascertain historical grasslands. Grassland linkages, which are necessary for pronghorns, were also identified. The project design was another collaborative effort between partners, who identified goals, partners, funding sources, project management, and monitoring plans.

The presentation provided statistics on the increase in water distribution and grassland restoration since 2000, as well as a matrix depicting fund sources / partnerships. Every dollar of special tag money (elk and antelope tags) was matched with three dollars from other funds.

GMU 4A Habitat Restoration Project	NRCS (WHIP)	LIP	***AGFD	**HPC	FWS (Partners)	Owner	Acres Funded	Acres Completed
Ohaco		\$375,000	\$25,000	\$100,000			8,620	2,793
Aja/Ohaco	\$150,000 (ASLD)			\$50,000			2,857	721
Aja			\$25,000		\$35,000		1,280	1,280
USFS 4A P/J Removal			\$75,000	\$75,000			1,740	
TOTAL	\$150,000	\$375,000	\$125,000	*\$225,000	\$35,000		14,497 Acres	\$62.77/Acre
Proposed Aja	\$288,000 (ASLD)	\$163,008				\$91,692	9,500	
Proposed Ohaco	\$192,000 (ASLD)	\$196,041		\$33,474 (?)		\$76,800	9,367	

Ken's presentation also included a slide show of photos of project areas.

The unit habitat enhancement also included several Forest Service (USFS) projects with a goal of containing exotic vegetation and riparian meadow restoration, according to their Environmental Management Analysis. Broadcast burns will occur at Nagel and Rim Lakes. On the Nagel burn,

4,000 acres was funded by special tags through the HPC process and 10,000 acres have been burned to date.

Future projects on the horizon include 30,000 acres of grasslands restoration, three additional catchments and a windmill project on the Hopi Three Canyons Ranch.

Technical difficulties prevented the showing of a video of a drum grinder in action. A question was asked about the cost per acre for the drum grinder. It depends on density, but is comparable to the agra axe cost per acre, but, mulches the carcasses on the spot, and eliminates the necessity of hiring hand crews to chop up the carcasses.

Another question was asked about maintenance of the High Point Well Pipeline, which is now eight years old. The project is planned for a regular maintenance routine on pipeline and drinker components. The AGFD Stewardship and Access programs usually fund maintenance costs.

Sun Valley Development Mule Deer Project:

David Grandmaison, Research Branch biologist, presented. David acknowledged partnerships that made the project possible between agencies and the Landowners West of the White Tanks group. The presentation included statistics on human population growth and associated impacts on the affected wildlife populations. Population growth in these areas is creating islands of wildlife habitat. This can result in local extirpation/reduced populations and low genetic diversity. The goal of the project is to maintain connectivity on landscape scale by providing wildlife corridors throughout the area. Secured open spaces are the core areas and are where the corridors connect. The previous project involved identification of these migration corridors. Maricopa County conducted a linkages workshop two weeks ago, with many and varied partners.

Linkage 65 is between the White Tanks and the Hassayampa River. The Sun Valley Development is the major threat to this linkage. Staff from the Department's Research and Habitat branches met with developers, who expressed interest in cooperating on the project, as they were formulating their development plan. The study was implemented with funding from the developer and the special mule deer tag fund, though an HPC project proposal. The objective of study was to identify mule deer corridors and maintain connectivity. Twelve animals, outfitted with spread-spectrum collars provided researchers with 14 points per day in plotting movements, looking at the permeability of the Sun Valley Parkway. The presentation included a video showing the movements of 4 bucks, indicating they were not confined to White Tanks Park boundaries. The deer carried the collars from February to November. Deer are heavily using the area of development.

Analysis of the movement data identified two main corridors. How does that play a role? The Sun Valley Parkway is acting as a barrier to mule deer movement. But crossings have occurred at several points. The deer do not cross at random - locations are related to water sources, and not influenced by habitat type or distance to washes. This data helps to identify on how to move animals. Crossing structures and water developments can help in crossing areas. The researchers identified the components of good corridor design. These include connecting core

habitat, contain suitable habitat, define corridors using data, identify crossing structure locations(s), and monitor corridors to evaluate success. One of the most important components for success of the project is the continued partnerships between landowners, municipalities, conservation groups, and agencies. The next steps will be to collar does. The Sun Valley developers, Maricopa County Department of Transportation, Maricopa County Flood Control District, the Arizona National Guard and Arizona Department of Transportation are involved.

Another area of similar interest is the Rainbow Valley near Buckeye. This involves Linkage 74, the connectivity between the Sonora National Monument and the Sierra Estrella. The developer in this area is also very interested in doing connectivity work.

The question was asked, "What should be the State HPCs role in supporting these projects, since corridors eventually get taken over by humans?" The Arizona Deer Association and other critter groups are pressuring parties to plan for corridors and habitat. Developers weren't always on board in the past, but are now. It was noted how such projects benefit the developers, especially if their marketing and advertising campaigns bill their developments as providing wildlife to the residents. Future protection could also include such incentives as conservation easements, the ownership of which can go to an NGO or agency. The vision needs to be extended statewide to project 25 and 50 years into the future. It is also a vision that should be shared by the local HPCs.

The City of Goodyear has annexed a lot of land in Rainbow Valley, which also includes land owned by the Bureau of Land Management. Everyone needs to be involved.

HPC Project and Process Update:

Brian Wakeling provided a handout depicting the new cycle. This is the first full year of new cycle, with a new project proposal deadline of September 1 (formerly March 1). Due to the shift in timeline, there were a lot of out of cycle projects. Funding projects earlier in the year (February) will cause the group to prioritize projects, based on projects of how much tag money will be raised that year. Proponents must be forward thinking, planning a year in advance; this should also help maintain the landscape-scale vision in project planning. This year's process went smoothly, even though there were quite a few out of cycle submittals.

Other points noted: Project pre-proposals should help to eliminate or minimize out of cycles requests. The purpose of the earlier cycle is to allow the critter groups to be involved in the planning stages, which should take place throughout the spring and summer leading up to the September 1st deadline. Allowing out of cycle projects keeps the flexibility needed for emergencies and fund matching, but should be kept to a minimum. From the point of view of the critter groups, pre-proposals are more important to them, to help save them during the busy proposal evaluation December-January timeline when project proponents are often hard to reach.

Funded HPC projects in 2007:

Leonard Ordway provided a handout of the spreadsheet showing the list of funded projects for both the last March and first September project cycles. March funding was a little over \$1M and September was \$1.6 M, with individual species totals. He asked the group to certify the list. A motion was made and passed. Al Eiden so moved, Craig McMullen seconded and the motion passed.

Local HPC Success Stories:

Craig McMullen for the Payson Natural Resources Committee: The group has several agra axe projects, but as yet, have been postponed due to weather.

Tom Mackin for the Williams-Flagstaff HPC: The group submitted about a half dozen projects, with \$400K funded for this year. These include earthen tanks on Hat Allotment in the Kaibab National Forest, a Tusayan grassland project, and Anderson Mesa projects. It is a win-win for everybody with good working relationships and partnerships increasing the scope of projects.

Larry Phoenix for the Forage Research Study Group: Precipitation has been good. A lot of snow, catchments are filling. FRSG is continuing their monitoring program. The June meeting will include monitoring. There are WCF and HPC funds for water projects, 5,600 acres of juniper shredding will occur near Hay Lake, and a brush removal project with the Hopi 3 Canyons Ranch. The group has a lot of participation from the Forest Service and landowners.

Ron Thompson for the Safford HPC: 6 catchments repaired as well as the prescribed burn in Unit 27. Participation from the Southeast Arizona Sportsmen's Club has been good. The group is focusing on landscape scope projects for deer in Dos Cabezas and collaborating with Region 5 for area habitat needs between the San Pedro R. to the Apache nation.

Lanie Ozment for the Prescott HPC: The Forest Service is working on the NEPA for 130,000 acres of projects in the Mingus Mountains, which includes catchments and a 100,000 acre burn. The Forest Service would like to see conservation group participation. Darren Tucker is the Department contact. Region 3 is also formulating district specific plans in the Prescott and Chino Valley areas in coordination with the Tonto and Prescott forests and the BLM. Darren Phase 1 of the Yavapai Ranch project is complete - \$140,000, including antelope tag funds and participation from the Arizona Antelope Foundation. This was done as part of the pre-land exchange and includes tree clearing and fence work – 2,000 more acres are slated for the next phase.

Wade Zarlingo for the Show Low HPC: Needs continued funding for A/S project. The NEPA work is completed for the Carlisle Complex - 24,000 acres. The group is still seeking funding for arch surveys.

Ron Eichelberger for the Springerville HPC: The group is involved with the Clifton Ranger District projects and Atascacita grassland project. The new HPC Chairman is Rex Brown.

There was no representative of the Tucson HPC present at the meeting, however, Hans Koenig emailed the following update: The Tucson HPC is a fairly recently chartered HPC that is meeting periodically at the Game & Fish Office in Tucson. We were successful in receiving grant funding for 9 projects proposed during the recent grant cycle. In addition, the ADA has committed to purchasing a 525 gallon water hauler to be stored in Tucson.

Unit 37A Wildlife Manager Bob Lemons, in coordination with the Santa Catalina Council of the Boy Scouts of America, has overseen the restoration of 6 wildlife water developments as Eagle Scout projects during the past year.

Upcoming water development projects include the Brandenburg and Buzan Bighorn sheep catchments which are scheduled to be developed on the weekend of March 15th using ADBSS and ADA volunteers and funding from the bighorn sheep, whitetail deer and javelina special tags.

Conservation Funding Partners:

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation – Ron Pittman: Ron reported that the new Unit 9 catchments are full. The Tusayan Pipeline will soon be completed. With uranium selling at \$70 per pound, There been over 2,000 mining claims filed in the state. RMEF will take a stance against it, as will Coconino County. At the RMEF annual convention, one of their best ever, the Arizona Elk tag was auctioned for \$125K.

Arizona Elk Society – Steve Clark: The Big Lake fence removal project is coming up. Other upcoming projects include the Burro Creek catchments, the 26 Bar Adopt-a-Ranch, and the placement of troughs to move elk out of riparian areas.

Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society - Pete Cimellaro: Annual fundraising banquet is tonight. The ADBSS and the ADA will be coordinating on two new catchments in the Aravaipa area - Buzan and Brandenburg. The ADA banquet will take place on May 10. At the Mule Deer Foundation's convention, the mule deer tag they auctioned went for \$122K.

National Wild Turkey Federation – Scott Lerich: The A/S has received a grant from NWTF to identify wet meadows. There will be many fundraising banquets in AZ this year. At the national convention in Atlanta, the Arizona Gould's turkey tag sold at auction for \$3,500. Leonard mentioned the success of previous Gould's turkey translocations and that all translocations are now conducted using birds from in state. The populations are doing so well, that it is no longer necessary to get birds from Mexico. Rio Grande turkeys have also been introduced on the Arizona Strip and are doing well. Scott thanked the Department for its work on Gould's turkeys.

Future Agenda Items and Next Meeting Date:

Ron Thompson mentioned that at local HPC meetings, between now and the summer meeting, the groups should be discussing project proposals, with the goal of getting pre-proposals in to the Game Branch as early as possible.

The next meeting will be at the AGFD's Region 1 office in Pinetop at 10:00 AM on August 2, 2008. As for future agenda items, the following suggestions were proposed: Showcase a unit. Showcase a local HPC and what they're involved in. A presentation from one of our conservation funding partners, or cooperative presentations. Periodic presentations of Development Branch and Research Branch projects are also welcome.

Ron Thompson asked what information is the most valuable for the groups. Project funding and progress on project implementation were most important factors. With improvements to technology, the Game Branch will be developing an electronic communication tool, possibly a newsletter. Ron asked interested parties to submit pictures, especially before and after shots of habitat treatments. Steve Clark said that AES would be pleased to do a presentation at the summer meeting, and it was suggested that Region 5 might also provide an interesting presentation on all the special tag-funded work taking place.

It was mentioned that the USFS is trying to remove inconsistency between forests in their planning.

Miscellaneous:

The question was raised about the relationship with the Navajo Nation as regards the Bouquillas Ranch. Lanie stated that the Department and the Navajo Nation signed an access for fall hunts, but the agreements, as yet are still year by year, nothing long-term. The Department is trying to get the Rose Well closure lifted. Benny suggested that the Cholla Cattle Company should be included in any discussions. It was mentioned that gates are being left open by railroad employees as well as hunters along El Paso right of way.

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 PM.